

Allan MacRae, Prophecies of Daniel: Lecture 3

I don't know whether I made the assignment for today altogether clear at the end of the last hour, but I posted it the next day on the bulletin board. So I trust most of you saw it there. The assignment had two parts. You were to look through Daniel 7 to see which verses are part of the vision and which are part of the interpretation, and also see which parts are figurative and which are literal. Most of you did very well on it. There were 2 or 3 from whom I expected good papers. I came to the conclusion that either they were not listening at the end of the hour or did not see it on the board or that they were much poorer in exegesis than I thought because they simply gave me a general comparison of chapter 7 and chapter 2 as to the general course of events. And that, of course, was not included in the assignment at all. That would not detract from the mark, but it couldn't add anything to it because they didn't deal with the two things I asked for, which were: which parts are part of the vision and which are literal? Which are parts of the vision and interpretation and which are figurative and which are literal? Now one or two, I got the impression, didn't understand what we mean by figurative or symbolic. And I think it's worth taking a minute or two on that right now.

In Daniel 2 we had a vision given, a vision or dream, that Nebuchadnezzar had. And Daniel described the vision to Nebuchadnezzar in verses 31 to 35. And every single thing in that vision was figurative; it was a symbol. And as we have noticed, if you simply heard that vision, you couldn't have any idea what it meant. They are symbols; they are figures. And unless you have seen the same figures used at some other time, you would have no way to approach the vision. You have to have an idea of what it's supposed to describe then you can make a comparison, without which you have no way to approach it. It is strictly figurative. Now perhaps strictly is just a little bit too strong, but mighty little. Because the only thing I notice in it that is at all literal is the statement at the end, "It filled the whole earth." Whatever it was "filled the whole earth." Now that, of course, is a

rather literal statement, but it could be part of a dream which he had. But up to that statement there was a statue described. And as we've noticed there are many things in the statue. We don't know just how many there were. We don't know how many fingers were visible. We don't have any reason to think the two arms and the chest had a specific reference as to parts of the second kingdom or anything of the kind. We don't have any definite evidence as to the specific meanings of the first three metals. We are told that the fourth one indicates strength. But there are many things that are figures and maybe just part of the general picture. As to what parts of it do have a meaning and what they mean, we would have no basis whatever to go on if we didn't have the interpretation. Of course, this is just a dream. And in the dream did he see a globe and see the stone just flowing around and covering the whole globe, or did he simply see the stone enlarging so that it covered everything he could see? We just don't know.

Now when we get to the interpretation, there we have a literal interpretation. And there we have to ask the question we just raised. What does the interpretation mean in that regard? But that is a question I don't want to take time to go into here right now. The vision is all figure. It is all symbol. And then we have the interpretation, which is separated by a verse from the vision. The two are completely separate and distinct in Daniel 2. And when you come to the interpretation in Daniel 2, the interpretation is all, I believe, literal. That is to say, it contains an occasional repetition of phrases. "Whereas you saw this... that means this." "Whereas you saw that... it means this." And the full meaning may not be totally explained, but you can infer things sometimes. But except for repetitions, it is entirely literal.

Now when you come to chapter 7, the situation is very different. So different that I have made a statement, a list, of chapter 7 that I think would be interesting for you to look at. In chapter 7, the vision runs from verse 2 to verse 14. And that vision is figurative except for the last verse of it. The last verse would seem to be quite definitely literal. But the rest of it is clearly figurative. I say this

with the possible exception of much of verses 9, 10, and 13. There are certain questions in those three verses as to just what is literal and what is figurative. The vision in chapter 7 runs from verses 2 to 14. I think that is quite obvious. And it is all figurative except the last verse, except verse 14, when it says in verse 14, “There was given him dominion and glory and the kingdom that all people, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which shall not pass away and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed.” That is a pretty literal statement. Now how would you see that in a vision, and yet still be part of the vision? Perhaps a voice said it and he heard it. But we don’t know. At any rate, it is quite a literal statement. But the rest of the vision is figurative except in verses 9, 10, and 13. There are certain statements on which we might have a question. And we will look at them later when we look in more detail.

But then, a very interesting thing in chapter 7 is that the interpretation which is given is part of the vision. You notice I said here that the interpretation is in the vision. The whole thing was a vision that Daniel had. But in the vision we read in Daniel 7 as verse 16 says, “I came near to one of those that stood by and asked him the truth of all this and he told me and made me know the interpretation of it.” So then we have an interpretation given which is only three verses. And these three verses are literal with the possible exception, I don’t think it is really one, but with the possible exception of a phrase at the end of verse 17. And then the strange thing here is that he’s been given this very brief interpretation which quickly summarizes the whole thing.

Then in verse 19, we find that Daniel expresses a desire for more information and the angel repeats a part of the vision. And as he repeats a part of the vision, he gives a little more detail than he’d given before. So we have a further description of part of the vision in verses 19 to 22. Verses 19 to 20 are figurative, clearly figurative. And verses 21 to 22 are mostly literal. And then in answer to this further question, which gave us further repetition in part and

additional information in part to what we've seen already in the vision, then we have an interpretation from 23 to 28a which is strictly literal. It's interesting to see how different it is from the very simple arrangement that we had in chapter 2.

Now that was the assignment for today, and we go back now to chapter 2. In chapter 2, we were looking at E. "The fifth part of the statue." I had just a couple of lines here that were on the last sheet that I didn't bring with me. Under E. Note the symbolic meaning of potter's clay: weak or brittle. I gave you 3, did I? Yes, that's 3 under E was, "Does the statement in verse 43 simply mean an un-integrated mixture of peoples?" And under that I mentioned small a, "If so, it will fit the whole history of each of these empires." The Babylonians not only conquered many nations, but they mixed them together. They carried people off from one section to another and from that to a third and so on. And so they were all mixed. So the statement in verse 43 about the feet being mixed with iron and clay and it says specifically in verse 43 that "whereas you saw iron mixed with miry clay they shall mingle themselves with the seed of men but they shall not cleave one with another even as iron is not mixed with clay." The mixture of iron and clay is clearly a statement that this mixture is to be weak or brittle, but this verse seems to go beyond that.

The most simple suggestion of this statement is that it is an un-integrated mixture of people. But if so, it would fit the Babylonian Empire and it would fit the Persian Empire, which conquered many kingdoms and which mixed them together to some extent. It would fit the Hellenistic Empire, which conquered the whole Persian Empire and made a great conglomeration of peoples with a small group of Greeks or Macedonians controlling the whole. It would certainly fit the Roman Empire. And so it doesn't seem to be anything distinctive if all it means is an un-integrated mixture of peoples, except that perhaps the mixture became greater between 400 and 600 A.D. than before because at that time Germanic tribes were marching back and forth across the Roman Empire pillaging and destroying and settling down here and there. But there had been Germanic peoples

entering the Roman Empire for the previous six centuries but entering in small groups and being assimilated. So it might fit that period a little better, but it could fit any period.

But I have here small b: "The possibility remains that it points to some factor that is not obvious." I didn't give that, did I? Let me read verse 43 again to you as it stands in the King James version: "And whereas thou sawest iron mixed with miry clay they shall mingle themselves with the seed of men but they shall not cleave on to another even as iron is not mixed with clay." Some have tried to show that it points out inter-marriage and ruling families. Well there was that in all the kingdoms, every one of them. So that certainly wouldn't be a distinctive feature. There was that in just about every period. And so that wouldn't be distinctive of the last part. It's a peculiar statement, and it may simply mean an un-integrated mixture of people which became more pronounced from 400 to 600 A. D. than ever before. Or it may include some element that is not clear to us. And if any of you have any good suggestions as to what they might be, I wish you would write them out and give them to me. I confess that as of the present, I am not sure if it does represent something more than that, but the peculiar language suggests it does to me very strongly, but what it is, I do not know.

Now we go on to number 4. Number 4: "The marked similarity of this part, that is the fifth part of the image, the feet and toes." The marked similarity of this part to the condition of the Roman Empire between A.D. 400 and 600 should be noted. I just mentioned that fact. At that time you had the western half of the Roman Empire being crossed by various barbarian tribes, conquering, pillaging, destroying, settling down for a time in one area, moving to another. You have a condition of inter-mixture of peoples far greater than ever before; you have a weakness along with strength; you have the violence of the conquering tribes; you have a certain amount of strength remaining in the Roman Empire, but not much in that period. What it did have came from some of these people, from these Germanic tribes, who took service under the Roman leaders, and they gave what

real strength there was in the Roman Empire during this time. But its name and its reputation still carried a great deal of weight. It's a period we can speak of as iron mixed with clay; it's a period of great intermingling of peoples. There is a marked similarity of those two centuries to that description in Daniel 2.

Now number 5. Verse 34 says that "the stone strikes the statue upon its feet of iron and clay." Now in a symbolic picture there are apt to be many elements that are just part of the picture and don't convey a meaning, like the two arms, possibly ten fingers. We don't know whether the fingers are shown or not or whether Nebuchadnezzar noticed them or not if they were shown. We don't know whether the arms were longer than usual or shorter than usual. But there were the normal features that a statue would have. So to have a meaning, you need an interpretation, unless you have a feature that is very, very unusual, like you have the unusual feature here of having different metals. Now the metals themselves may not have a specific meaning, but the fact that you have a difference of metals certainly is an unusual thing, which has a meaning: that there is a change from one empire to the other.

Well, now, the stone strikes the statue where he specifically said "upon its feet of iron and clay." And since the statue represents a progression of events, when it is specifically said that the stone strikes the statue on the feet of iron and clay, that would suggest very strongly that the event described by the hitting of the statue by this stone and demolishing it were something that would take place in the fifth period, in the fifth part of the statue, rather than in one of the first four. That, it seems to me, is quite obvious, but there are those who do not like that idea at all. I noticed in one commentary here that the statement is made, "The striking of the feet is symbolical and does not necessarily have any particular reference to the fourth kingdom. The image is struck on the feet because such a blow will cause it to totter and fall. Where else would one strike a blow that would cause the entire image to fall?"

Well, that is a case where a man has a certain interpretation that he wants to stand for and therefore he tries to twist everything in line with it or to explain away anything that doesn't fit with it. Now this particular commentary I'm not criticizing greatly on this account. It is a little worse than a good many commentaries on this direction. People approach with a definite idea in mind and then they try to fit everything into their idea or to explain away what doesn't seem to fit. It specifically said that the stone strikes the image upon its feet that are of iron and clay. Why does it bother to tell us where it strikes? Why not just say it struck the image and destroyed it? It seems that likely that for some reason saying where it hits the image is important, but more than that, hitting it on the feet is a very unusual and strange thing. If one of you were standing here and for some reason I wanted to demolish you, I can't imagine I'd pick up a stone and try to hit you on the feet. I think that would be the last place I would think of aiming at. And if there were a statue here I wanted to knock over, I might hit it in the head, in the chest, perhaps even in the legs, but I can't imagine that I would hit it in the feet in order to knock it over. It is so obvious that it is something unusual, something that is strange and is so specifically named here that it is rather ludicrous when a commentator tries to get rid of it by a statement like this. Where else would you hit it to knock it over? Well, anywhere except there. That would be the least likely place that you would ever hit it. So we notice that as a specific fact about the fifth part of the statue that verse 34 says that is where the stone strikes the statue, on its feet of iron and clay.

Now that is E and we'll now go on to F, which I have with me here and we can observe. F is "The dynamic series of events." We have been looking at the parts of the statue, the set figure that he saw. But now, as we notice, things begin to move. There is a dynamic series of events. Now let's look at the biblical statements about these, and here I have a reference to the sheet that I gave you. This was the assignment last week: for you to look at them and see how the statements related to each of these three events, which we have already noticed are

here. The three events are: the origin of the stone, the effect of the stone upon the statue, and the enlargement or growth of the stone. And so here I have taken verses 34-35 and verses 44-45. I've simply taken the King James Version of those verses and I have arranged them to indicate which relate to these three events. You'll notice that in the account of the events . . . well, first there's an introduction. "Thou sawest until . . ." That connects it with what precedes. He's looking at the image, then he sees these events begin to happen.

The first of these is the origin. The stone was cut without hands. Then we have the effect of the stone. It strikes the image and completely demolishes the image. And it uses very strong language to show how every part of the image gets all mixed together and all carried off so there's nothing left of it. And then I indicated, by G here, "The growth of the stone." That is the third there, but in the interpretation it begins with an introductory phrase: "In the days of these kings . . ." Then the origin is rather summarized that the God of heaven will set up a kingdom." That's not merely the origin, it summarizes the whole thing, you might say. But it specifically deals with the first and last part. It is the God of heaven who sets up the kingdom, but the stone filling the whole earth is paralleled by the fact that the kingdom God sets up will never be destroyed and that kingdom will not be left to other people.

But then it goes on in verse 44 to tell about the demolition of the statue, that it shall break in pieces and that it shall consume all these kingdoms. And, of course, we do not take that altogether literally. It does mean that the people of those kingdoms are all broken in pieces; it doesn't mean the land is all broken in pieces or their buildings are all broken in pieces. It means the characteristic features of these kingdoms are all demolished. Everything that was represented by the gold, the bronze, the silver, and the iron and clay is demolished. Everything that is typified by Nebuchadnezzar's empire and these other empires which rule over the earth, most of them in defiance to God, most of them in utter disregard to his righteous laws were to be broken in pieces and consumed.

And then we have a reiteration of the fact, “. . . and it shall stand forever.” And then we go back to the origin again by simply repeating the statements of the visions. “For as much as you saw that the stone was cut out the mountain without hands. . .” And then a repetition of the destruction of the statue and that it broke in pieces. The iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold. And then there is a final conclusion.

Now I just have to say a word about the first phrase in the interpretation. “In the days of these kings. . .” You ask immediately “What kings?” and you find many commentaries which tell you that they are kings who are described in chapter 7. Well, it is quite unbelievable that Daniel in the time of Nebuchadnezzar, speaking to him would use a phrase which was referring to something that was not revealed to Daniel until 45 years later. We can use a later revelation to throw light on an earlier revelation, but we cannot read it back into the earlier revelation. My purpose in this course is not to find what the scripture teaches about the future. My purpose is certainly not to give you my interpretation of all these matters. My purpose is to go through it with you, carefully seeing exactly what is clear and definite and what there is on which we perhaps do not know the answer and would have to wait till further revelation to find out.

And so when here he says, “In the days of these kings . . .” The only reasonable interpretation would be that it means the kings already mentioned and it has mentioned Nebuchadnezzar. And then it has mentioned kingdoms that follow him. The terms "king" and "kingdom" are sometimes interchanged. They are used rather loosely in the Scripture, whether referring to the man or referring to the whole kingdom over which he rules. And in this case, the whole context would seem to require that when he says, “In the days of these kings . . .” he means, within the time represented by these four kingdoms and the fifth, whether it be part of the fourth or whether it be a separate kingdom. That’s not made clear in this chapter, but it is made clear in chapter 7. In either case, it is in the days of the kings we have been talking about.

Now there are commentaries that say, “Of course this is referring to the ten toes, they represent ten kings. And in the days of the ten kings, represented by the ten toes, this is going to happen.” Methodologically, that is reading too much into this statement. It is only 45 years later that anything is revealed about the number ten in connection with the fifth part of vision. And so we are not warranted in reading that back. Now if there was a statement made, “There were ten toes,” something to call attention specifically to the toes, that might perhaps give a little ground for such an interpretation, that the ten toes represent ten kings. But unless you have a statement here, it’s very hazardous to read something like that into a picture. We may find that taught in chapter 7, but I don’t believe we can read it back at this point. So we must beware, then, of taking a view that has been adopted and reading it into what is there, either by saying ten toes, the number of which is not mentioned here and nothing said about the toes having a specific meaning any more than the fingers, or the nose, or the eyes, or any other part, to now say that had a meaning at that time, or on the other hand, to say when it specifically says something unusual, that it struck it upon its feet that were of clay and iron, to just say, “well, where else would you strike it to knock it over?” They are both reading into it a previously established system. Now we do not want to read anything in, but to read out what we find there.

And so we go on from there to look specifically at these three events and we look at number 2: “The origin of the stone.” And as to the origin of the stone, all that is said is on this sheet that I gave you this morning. As to the origin of the stone, we are told that the stone was cut without hands in Daniel’s account of the vision. But in his interpretation he says, “For as much as you saw that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands. . .” It does not say that the stone was a new creation. It doesn’t say, “Something came into existence that did not exist before.” But it does say, it was cut out. There is a new phase, at least; there is a new form. There is a new representation in some way. A stone was cut out without hands. A stone was cut out of the mountains without hands. We can very clearly

draw from this the teaching that the origin of the stone is entirely supernatural. It is cut without hands. It is not something that any human being or human force produces.

Now the early church fathers felt that in this verse, there was a very definite reference to the virgin birth. I'm not sure we can be quite as certain of that. We must certainly mention as a possibility that the being cut out without hands refers to the supernatural birth of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is certainly a possibility. But that is something on which we certainly should not speak dogmatically, at least not at this point.

Now the second of these dynamic events is, of course 3: "The effect on the statue." And the effect on the statue we have rather fully described in the picture in verse 34-35 and also in the end of the interpretation in verse 45. It breaks in pieces, all the different parts of the statue. And breaks into tiny pieces so that the wind carries them away and there's nothing left of them. The completeness of the destruction is surely emphasized here. This certainly does not represent something that is going to take place in certain sections of the world, scattered here and there. It is something that completely eradicates the previous situation. The completeness of the destruction is stressed just about as thoroughly as anything can be stressed. There is in this an end to all that the statue symbolizes: all of human glory, all of human clever organization, all of human violence, all of human autocracy, all the things that are represented by the different parts of the statue. It is not merely the fifth part of the statue that is destroyed; they all are destroyed.

Well, how can they all be destroyed when the Babylonian Empire came to an end, at least many, many centuries before the stone strikes the image? Because the qualities of kingdoms are much the same throughout. There is a difference of name, there is a difference of language, there is a different culture, but that which is symbolized by Nebuchadnezzar's control and the activities of his government is found in the Persian government also, and is found in the Hellenistic government and the Roman government. Different forms, many places, varying amounts of

freedom on the part of individuals among them, varying at different times within these governments, but there is always that fact that big government, autocracy, and control over the lives of people are often mixed with wrath, and with corruption, and with violence, and with clever human organization. The clever human planning is characteristic of these empires. And we are told that it is completely demolished, completely destroyed by the stone. So the completeness of the destruction is one thing that is very greatly stressed here.

Then at number 4: "The growth of the stone: "It is made very definite that the stone demolishes the image, completely destroys it, and it grows until it fills the whole earth. Well, the picture seems to be a picture of a rapid change. But it does not say that the stone grows at lightening speed until it fills the whole earth. It does not say even that the stone cut out of the mountain comes at lightening speed to hit the statue. Neither of those statements is made. And so, while it is absolutely clear that it fills the whole earth and that the statue and all that it stands for is completely demolished, we have a question: Is the growth gradual or rapid? A question which we cannot say is dogmatically answered in the picture. And then there is another question: When does the growth of the stone begin? Does the stone begin to enlarge to fill the whole earth only after the entire statue has been demolished, or does the growth of the stone begin at an earlier time? That we cannot be dogmatic about, either from the picture or from the interpretation. And that finishes F, so we can go on to G.

G now gets us to various attempts at relating these dynamic events to history. Now I have called G: "Relating these dynamic events to history." I have not said "Relating the whole prophesy to history," because the four kingdoms are pretty clear. We have a long history about which we know many facts and we have many remarkable points fitting together between the picture, as shown there, and the events during a thousand years after the time of Daniel. And so we are particularly interested in attempts now to relate the dynamic events to history. And first we note the view of the critics. This is the view which was published in the

second or third century A.D. by Porphyry, a view which was denied and attacked by Christian writers in the next few centuries but which within the last two or three centuries has been adopted by most of the so-called "higher critics," and even by many who would not wish to be called higher critics. There are many commentaries on Daniel which adopt this view, the view of the critics. And according to this view, the book of Daniel was not written at the time of Nebuchadnezzar, but was written about 400 years later. According to this view, it was written at a time when a Syrian king, one of the Hellenistic Empire, tried to put a complete end to the Jewish religion. There was great persecution involved in this and a group of Jews fled into the wilderness. There they gathered together into bands which attacked the various parts of the Syrian control and eventually won complete freedom for Judea, a freedom which lasted for about a century. And these leaders came to be called the Maccabees. And so this period we can well speak of as the time of the Maccabees, and according to the view that is held by all the critics and by some who would not call themselves critics, the book of Daniel was written by someone at that period and made out to be prophecy when it was really his knowledge of history. And thus he portrayed, as if it was predicted 400 years earlier, the course of events up to his time. And then when you get to his time, it goes on in the prophecy and what it contains is only wishful hopes. He believed, or at least he tried to make people believe, that they were to be delivered from their difficulties by God intervening and completely destroying this wicked power that was trying to destroy them.

And so that is the view, and it's surprising to find some who are usually thought of as very earnest Christians presenting this view in their commentaries. For instance, F. W. Farrar, the author of *The Life of Christ*, which is highly regarded as a commentary on Daniel, in which he takes this view. The same is true of Moses Stuart, both of whom have written some very fine Christian material, but who take this view regarding Daniel. I, personally, don't see how they can because the New Testament definitely takes the attitude, Christ definitely takes the attitude,

that the Old Testament is entirely true and reliable. When you look at the history, that is a great difficulty with this critical view. According to this view, the time of the Maccabees has to be the fourth kingdom, and according to history, it's only the third kingdom. Nebuchadnezzar, as you have the sheet that I gave you all last week, Nebuchadnezzar's empire was succeeded by the Persian Empire, which lasted for two centuries, and that by the Hellenistic Empire. And so we have three empires and the Romans came later, the fourth, and there are four empires in this picture--and either a fifth or a second part of the fourth. And so that is a very great difficulty with the theory, it imagines a Median empire between the Babylonian and the Persian, though the book of Daniel specifically tells us that the kingdom of Nebuchadnezzar was given to the Medes and Persians, putting them together as one empire. Now that is one view, then, the view of the critics.

Now a second view, which you will not find in any commentary as far as I know, is the obvious view as it might be seen at A.D. 750, if the New Testament were left out of consideration. In A.D. 750, a person who knew nothing about the New Testament could look at this picture in Daniel and say, "There's the Babylonian Empire conquered by the Persian Empire, conquered by the Hellenistic Empire, then conquered by the Roman Empire." And the Roman Empire stood there for as long as the two preceding ones put together, in fact longer than the two preceding ones, maybe as long as the other three. It was a great, powerful empire until about A.D. 400. And then between A.D. 400 and A.D. 600, you have a period when the Roman Empire was largely broken into pieces. And when these German tribes were going through, seizing this part and that part and the other part, and at A.D. 400, the probabilities are that, let us say, three-fourths of the people in the Roman Empire could read and write. And by about A.D. 500, at least in the Western Empire, I doubt if one person in thirty could read and write. There was a tremendous decline in every aspect of civilization during those years between A.D. 400 and 600.

And then at A.D. 600, there came a new force into the world, a force which its followers believed was a supernatural force. Muhammad declared that God had sent him; he declared there is one God and Muhammad is his prophet, and he declared that all people should turn to belief in one God. And after preaching this for a number of years and getting about eight or ten converts and being in danger for his life in Mecca, finally he fled from Mecca and went to Medina and there he started the new system, starting to force people to adopt his view. And he filled the Arab tribes with enthusiasm for his teaching and also for the plunder they were getting, and the armies marched out shortly after A.D. 600 and within very few years most of the Eastern Empire had been conquered. The new Persian force that had developed had been completely overcome. All of north Africa had been overrun, and Spain had been taken, and it looked as if the whole world was going to fall into their hands. And so here you had something which its believers felt was a supernatural thing, something which seemed about to completely destroy the empires which preceded it, which seemed about to grow so it would fill the whole earth. And so you have the obvious view as it would appear to somebody living at A.D. 750, if the New Testament is left out of consideration.

But you have here, too, a great difficulty, just as we had with the critical view. The difficulty is that what appeared to be the case in A.D. 750, no longer appears to be the case today. There was this tremendous spread of Islam, this tremendous spread of Muhammadism, which held the land of Israel for 800 years. Jerusalem was in Muslim hands, which spread over a large part of the world and which looked as if it was going to conquer the world. But eventually it became weak, and today would have comparatively little power in the world if it were not for the money that is received from oil. It is today a comparatively weak force in the world. And so here is something which might have appeared to be precisely the fulfillment, but which did not work out. Now we look at certain other interpretations I was hoping to get to today. We will not try to get a conclusion as

to the correct interpretation of chapter 2, but look forward next time to further evidence from other sections.

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